DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 143 010 CS 203 556

TITLE	Language Usage in the United States. Current Population Reports, Special Studies. Series P-23, No. 60 (Revised).
INSTITUTION	Department of Commerce, Washington, D.C.
SPONS AGENCY	National Center for Education Statistics (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	Jul 76
NOTE	7p.; tables contain small print
AVAILABLE FROM	Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402 (Stock No. 003-001-90546-9, $.35 paper)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Bilingualism; Census Figures; English; *English (Second Language); *Language Handicaps; *Language Usage; *National Surveys; *Non English Speaking; *Second Languages; Spanish Speaking
IDENTIFIERS	*Bureau of the Census

ABSTRACT

The data presented in this report were compiled from responses to questions regarding language usage and education that were included in the Current Population Survey conducted in July 1975 by the Bureau of the Census. This is an advance report and is to be followed by a more detailed Census Bureau report on the same subject. Data are reported for the following areas: usual language spoken by persons four years old and over; usual language spoken in households; second language spoken by persons four years old and over; second language spoken in households; age distribution of the population in various language groups; difficulty with English experienced by persons for whom English is not the usual language; and school enrollment status of those reporting difficulty with English. The data indicate that 90% of United States residents have no second language and that Spanish is the second most widely used language in the United States, following English. Of the persons four years old and over for whom English was not reported as the usual language, approximately 60% reported difficulty in speaking or understanding English. (GW)

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CURRENT POPULATION REPORTS

Special Studies

U.S. Department of Commerce
BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

Series P-23, No. 60 (Revised)

Issued July 1976

LANGUAGE USAGE IN THE UNITED STATES: JULY 1975 (Advance report)

The data presented in this report are from the Current Population Survey conducted in July 1975 by the Bureau of the Census. Supplementary questions bearing on language usage and on education were included in the survey at the request and with the support of the National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. This is an advance report and is to be followed by a more detailed Census Bureau report on the same subject later this year.

As a Nation, few Americans are bilingual. Nine out of every ten persons reported that they had no second language. Of those who did report a second language, either English or Spanish was that second language in slightly more than half the cases, with Spanish being reported as the second language almost as often as English (4.3 million persons to 4.9 million). Other languages reported as the second language of a million or more persons 4 years old or over included French, German, and Italian.

Spanish is the second most widely used language in the United States, following English. About 4 million persons (4 years old and over) reported Spanish as their usual language; about 96 percent of all persons (4 years old and over) reported English as their usual language.

In addition to questions on the current usage of language by individuals, the survey also asked about the language generally used by the household at home. About 1-1/2 million households reported that Spanish was the usual household language. These households contained close to 5 million persons (4.8 million) 4 years old and over, but it should be noted that many of these people also spoke English as the usual language. In fact, the survey showed that a rather significant proportion (20 percent) of persons in these households reported English as their individual language.

The age distribution of the population in the various language groups reflects the variations in age structure among ethnic groups rather than peculiarities inherent within the language. Nevertheless, it is of interest to examine broad age patterns of various language groups because of different consequences resulting from language problems at various points along the life cycle. Although most languages shown here have been reported as the usual language of too few persons to provide estimates that are reliable enough for analysis by age groups, there are, however, some significant deviations. For example, only about 5 percent of persons whose usual language is Italian are of elementary and high school age—between the ages of 6 and 17—compared with 21 percent of those whose usual language is Spanish. Also, although only 11 percent of the total population are 65 years and over, 44 percent of those whose usual language is Italian are in this age group.

The survey also asks questions about the difficulty with English, and of the 8 million persons 4 years old or over for whom English was not reported as the usual language, around 5 million (approximately 60 percent) reported difficulty in speaking or understanding English. Difficulty with English was reported by 54 percent of the 4 million persons whose usual language was Spanish and between 300,000 and 400,000 of these reported themselves as enrolled in school at some time during the 1974-75 school year.

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Of the approximately 450,000 persons 4 years old and over who reported Italian as their usual language—the next largest group after Spanish reporting a usual language other than English—about two-thirds reported difficulty with English.

In general, for persons whose usual language is other than English, the percentages having difficulty with English tended to be lower among persons of elementary and high school ages than those of other age groups. Presumably there is a greater exposure to English among persons in the 6-to-17-year age group, virtually all of whom are enrolled in school. In all, there were 46.6 million persons in the 6-to-17-year age group, of whom 1.4 million (or 3 percent) reported a usual language other than English. And of the 1.4 million, approximately 600,000 (or 45 percent) reported difficulty with English.

The estimates in this report are derived from a sample and are therefore subject to sampling error. The sampling error is primarily a measure of sampling variability, that is, of the variations that occur by chance because a sample rather than the whole of the population is surveyed. However, all the statements of comparison in this report are statistically significant at a level of more than 2.0 standard errors. This means the chances are at least 19 out of 20 that a specified difference cited in the text indicates a true difference in the population. A more complete statement on the variability due to sampling, as well as more detailed information about language usage, will be issued in a later report in this series.

Table 1. USUAL LANGUAGE SPOKEN BY PERSONS 4 YEARS OLD AND OVER, BY BROAD AGE GROUPS: JULY 1975

Usual language of person	Persons		Percent by age						
	Number (thousands)	Percent	Total, 4 years and over	4 and 5 years	6 to 17 years	18 to 24 years	25 to 44 years	45 to 64 years	65 years and over
All languages	196,796	100.0	100.0	3.6	23.7	13.3	26.7	21.9	10.8
English	188,799	95.9	100.0	3.6	24.0	13.4	26.5	22.0	10.7
Spanish	4,027	2.0	100.0	5.5	21.4	12.5	34.7	18.0	7.9
Chinese	280	0.1	100.0	4.8	11.9	12.8	29.8	26.2	14.6
Filipino	112	0.1	100.0	1.3	12.5	6.2	34.0	30.1	15.7
French	270	0.1	100.0	0.7	2.2	10.1	18.0	35.3	33.8
German	132	0.1	100.0	2.5	7.5	3.5	29.8	30.3	26.5
Greek	124	0.1	100.0	1.1	17.2	5.5	30.7	25.1	20.4
Italian	447	0.2	100.0	0.7	5.1	4.5	18.1	28.0	43.6
Japanese	111	0.1	100.0	4.0	7.3	0.8	43.1	21.8	22.9
Korean	90	-	100.0	2.2	20.4	7.4	49.3	10.0	10.7
Portuguese	110	0.1	100.0	7.5	8.4	6.4	38.5	25.8	13.3
Other	812	0.4	100.0	1.7	10.1	8.7	28.3	20.6	30.6
Not reported	1,477	0.8	100.0	3.1	21.4	17.7	25.3	20.7	11.7

- Represents zero or rounds to zero.

Table 2. USUAL LANGUAGE SPOKEN IN HOUSEHOLDS: JULY 1975 (REVISED)

Usual language of household	Households[1]		Persons 4 years and over in households[2]	
	Number (thousands)	Percent	Number (thousands)	Percent
All languages	71,537	100.0	196,796	100.0
English	67,308	94.1	185,545	94.3
Spanish	1,448	2.0	4,822	2.5
Chinese	111	0.2	353	0.2
Filipino	43	0.1	122	0.1
French	125	0.2	285	0.1
German	59	0.1	157	0.1
Greek	50	0.1	161	0.1
Italian	195	0.3	522	0.3
Japanese	43	0.1	109	0.1
Korean	35	-	123	0.1
Portuguese	43	0.1	143	0.1
Other	397	0.6	966	0.5
Not reported	1,680	2.3	3,487	1.8

- Represents zero or rounds to zero.

[1] Number of total households adjusted to agree with Current Population Reports, Series P-25, No. 623.

[2] This distribution differs from that in table 1 because persons are classified here by the usual language for the household, whereas table 1 classifies persons by their own usual language.

Table 3. SECOND LANGUAGE SPOKEN BY PERSONS 4 YEARS OLD AND OVER: JULY 1975

Second language of person	Persons 4 years and over	
	Number (thousands)	Percent
Total	196,796	100.0
With second language	17,369	8.8
English	4,942	2.5
Spanish	4,284	2.2
Chinese	198	0.1
Filipino	210	0.1
French	1,187	0.6
German	1,277	0.6
Greek	265	0.1
Italian	1,442	0.7
Japanese	267	0.1
Korean	92	-
Portuguese	173	0.1
All other languages	3,033	1.5
No second language	177,964	90.4
Not reported whether second language	1,463	0.7

- Represents zero or rounds to zero.

Table 4. SECOND LANGUAGE SPOKEN IN HOUSEHOLDS: 1975 (REVISED)

Second language of household	Households[1]		Persons 4 years and over in households[2]	
	Number (thousands)	Percent	Number (thousands)	Percent
Total	71,537	100.0	196,796	100.0
With second language	8,369	11.7	24,810	12.6
English	2,224	3.1	6,993	3.6
Spanish	1,610	2.3	5,189	2.6
Chinese	68	0.1	196	0.1
Filipino	70	0.1	255	0.1
French	683	1.0	1,990	1.0
German	822	1.1	2,131	1.1
Greek	105	0.1	327	0.2
Italian	785	1.1	2,331	1.2
Japanese	119	0.2	418	0.2
Korean	40	0.1	126	0.1
Portuguese	87	0.1	206	0.1
All other languages	1,756	2.5	4,648	2.4
No second language	61,347	85.8	168,191	85.5
Not reported whether second language	1,822	2.5	3,795	1.9

[1]Number of total households adjusted to agree with Current Population Reports, Series P-25, No. 623.

[2]This distribution differs from that in table 3 because persons are classified here by the second language for the household, whereas table 3 classifies persons by their own second language.

Table 5. PERSONS REPORTING ENGLISH OR SPANISH AS USUAL OR SECOND LANGUAGE, IN TOTAL AND IN COMBINATION: JULY 1975

Usual and second language	Persons 4 years and over	
	Number (thousands)	Percent
Total	196,796	100.0
Usual language of person:		
Usual language English, total	188,799	95.9
Usual language English, second language Spanish	4,212	2.1
Usual language Spanish, total	4,027	2.0
Usual language Spanish, second language English	2,934	1.5
Usual language other than English or Spanish	2,493	1.3
Usual language not reported	1,477	0.8
Second language of person:		
Second language English, total	4,942	2.5
Second language Spanish, total	4,284	2.2
Other second language	8,143	4.1
No second language	177,964	90.4
Not reported whether second language	1,463	0.7

Table 6. PERSONS 4 YEARS OLD AND OVER WITH USUAL LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH, BY DIFFICULTY IN ENGLISH AND SCHOOL ENROLLMENT STATUS: JULY 1975

(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	Total persons, 4 years and over	Enrolled in school at anytime since September 1974		Not enrolled in school since September 1974	
		Number	Percent of total	Number	Percent of total
Language other than English, total	7,997	1,935	24.2	6,062	75.8
With difficulty in English[1]	4,913	930	18.9	3,983	81.1
Percent with difficulty	61.4	48.0	(X)	65.7	(X)
Usual language of person with difficulty:					
Spanish	2,176	359	16.5	1,817	83.5
Chinese	147	11	7.8	136	92.2
Filipino	23	(B)	(B)	(B)	(B)
French	83	2	2.2	81	97.8
German	33	(B)	(B)	(B)	(B)
Greek	75	12	16.1	63	83.9
Italian	300	2	0.5	299	99.5
Japanese	85	8	9.9	76	90.1
Korean	57	(B)	(B)	(B)	(B)
Portuguese	80	-	-	-	-
Other	399	56	14.0	343	86.0
Not reported	1,454	455	31.3	999	68.7
With no difficulty in English[1]	3,084	1,006	32.6	2,078	67.4

-Represents zero or rounds to zero.
B Base less than 75,000; no subsets shown.
X Not applicable.
[1]Only persons reporting a language other than English were asked about difficulty in English.
[2]Includes persons who did not report as to difficulty.

Table 7. PERSONS AT SELECTED AGES BY WHETHER USUAL LANGUAGE WAS ENGLISH AND WHETHER DIFFICULTY WITH ENGLISH: JULY 1975

Subject	Total persons, 4 years and over	4 and 5 years	6 to 13 years	14 to 17 years	18 to 24 years	25 years and over
Total persons (thousands)	196,796	7,065	29,879	16,762	26,211	116,879
Usual language English (thousands)	188,799	6,743	28,902	16,335	25,260	111,560
As percent of total persons	95.9	95.4	96.7	97.4	96.4	95.4
Usual language other than English[1] (thousands)	7,997	322	977	428	951	5,320
As percent of total persons	4.1	4.6	3.3	2.6	3.6	4.6
With difficulty in English[2] (thousands)	4,913	223	462	175	561	3,492
As percent of persons with usual language other than English	61.4	69.3	47.3	40.9	59.0	65.6

[1]Includes persons for whom usual language was not reported.
[2]Only persons reporting a language other than English were asked about difficulty with English.

Table 8. USUAL AND SECOND LANGUAGE OF PERSONS REPORTING ENGLISH OR SPANISH AS USUAL HOUSEHOLD LANGUAGE: JULY 1975

Characteristic	Persons 4 years and over	
	Number (thousands)	Percent
Usual household language English, total	185,545	100.0
Usual language of person:		
English	183,547	98.9
Spanish	285	0.2
All other and not reported	1,714	0.9
Second language of person:		
Spanish	3,299	1.8
English	559	0.3
Chinese	112	0.1
Filipino	180	0.1
French	1,128	0.6
German	1,212	0.7
Greek	220	0.1
Italian	1,285	0.7
Japanese	244	0.1
Portuguese	131	0.1
All other and not reported	4,130	2.2
No second language	173,045	93.3
Usual household language Spanish, total	4,822	100.0
Usual language of person:		
Spanish	3,734	77.4
English	975	20.2
All other and not reported	113	2.3
Second language of person:		
English	2,731	56.6
Spanish	960	19.9
All other and not reported	110	2.3
No second language	1,021	21.2